



**PUBLIC BUILDING
COMMISSION** of Chicago

August 13, 2019
BOARD MEETING

HACIA Monthly Membership Meeting



Metropolitan Family Services North Center Community Hiring Event



Whitney M. Young, Jr. Branch Library featured in *Chicago Architect Magazine*



Design Architect: bKL Architecture // Architect of Record: Johnson & Lee, Ltd.

WHITNEY M. YOUNG, JR. BRANCH

The Whitney M. Young, Jr., branch of the Chicago Public Library has long been a community anchor, hosting numerous classes and community events within the Chatham neighborhood. Designed originally by Jay Carow in 1973, the small structure with distinctive modernist features required an update. As a part of the ongoing efforts by the City of Chicago to modernize libraries across the city, bKL Architecture was brought on to rehab the existing structure and create a new, integrated addition.

The project was led by two South Side natives: Danielle Tillman, AIA,

from bKL Architecture (the project's Design Architect) and Chris Lee, FAIA, of Johnson & Lee, Ltd (the project's Architect of Record). Both architects deeply understood the community's affections for its branch. "The library has been a longstanding community anchor in the Chatham neighborhood. Historically it's been a place for all types of activities — children's activities, book signings and readings and concerts. People who had heard about the renovation of the building would talk about when they lived in the neighborhood or even outside of the neighborhood, that it was the strongest library on the South Side," Tillman commented.

"I visited the site in the mornings, and it always amazed me that there were people waiting to get in," added Lee.

Tillman noted two distinctive library features that she knew would contribute to its unique sense of place: the original coffered ceilings and an underused courtyard. "The coffered ceiling we found to be quite interesting and a little bit of a design challenge as we were looking to renovate the space. And then, the courtyard; it was not utilized, but it was a green, outdoor space that one typically doesn't find in a building."

The architects met with representatives from Chicago

Public Libraries and several local librarians, who expressed that they desired more community and collaborative spaces. "They had so many resources but didn't feel they had the space to make use of everything," Tillman said.

"They were bursting at the seams," exclaimed Lee.

Preserving much of the existing structure, the design team chose to create a sleek, glass addition that, as Tillman notes, "felt like a light touch and highlighted the architecture that remained: the existing brick, and coffered ceiling."

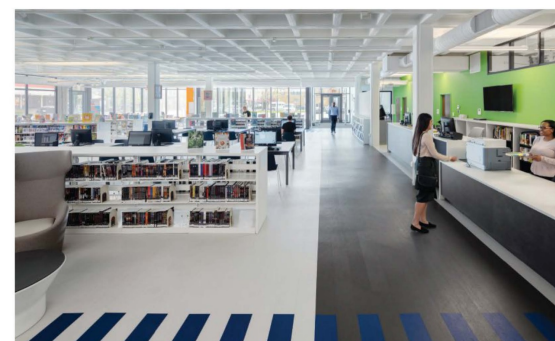
The courtyard now greets visitors as they enter the library.



The final building creates spaces for all of CPL's technology-focused programming, including a separate area for teen programs that, while separated for a sound barrier, still retains a visual connection to the main library space. The existing structure provides an open yet cozy floorplan for general reading and reference, as well as children's activities.

Today the building is, as Lee notes, "A proverbial beacon for knowledge. The glass addition glows at night and during the day, it invites people to look in."

Overall the program's goal was to, as Tillman put it, "really show the building as a neighborhood anchor. The Chatham neighborhood has historically been a very proud neighborhood and the residents wanted to highlight that with one of the strong community centers in the area's functions." In this way the new Whitney M. Young, Jr., branch serves as a means to advocate for the community as the community has come to advocate for its library, something that Tillman sees as invaluable to the architecture



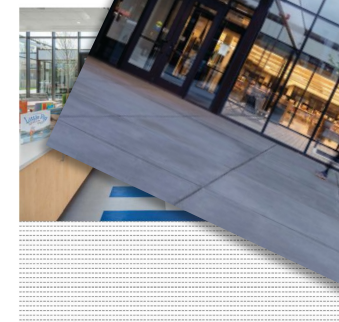
"THE LIBRARY HAS BEEN A LONGSTANDING COMMUNITY ANCHOR IN THE CHATHAM NEIGHBORHOOD. HISTORICALLY IT'S BEEN A PLACE FOR ALL TYPES OF ACTIVITIES — CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES, BOOK SIGNINGS AND READINGS AND CONCERTS."

— DANIELLE TILLMAN, AIA

profession, as well. "Architects should go out and use these spaces," Tillman stated. "We think that something has

been left behind just because people don't think about using libraries, but when they're active spaces — when

people are using them — you share that libraries are beautiful places, and this helps us advocate for them." CA





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